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SUBJECT: RE-ELECTED INDEPENDENT SHIA ISLAMIST
PARLIAMENTARIAN RESENTFUL ABOUT USG SUNNI OUTREACH EFFORTS

REF: BAGHDAD 0095

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) At a February 14 introductory meeting, Hassan Radi Khadim al-Sari, leader of the Hezbollah Movement of Iraq Party, repeatedly railed against the Embassy for reaching out to Sunni "terrorists" and for ignoring the Shia. He said the U.S.-Shia relationship used to be a partnership, but that it had deteriorated because of the Embassy's Sunni outreach efforts and its criticism of the Jafari government, particularly the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

¶2. (C) Sari alleged that Sunni Arabs are participating in both the political process and the resistance, damaging the credibility of the U.S. and the democratic process itself. He said most Sunni Arabs benefited from Saddam's regime, do not believe in democracy, and would like to seize power again. PolOffs responded that the goal of Sunni outreach is to bring Sunnis into the political process and out of the resistance, but not to return Iraq back to the Saddamist era. Poloffs said that the Embassy has reiterated to Sunni Arab leaders that they cannot participate in the political process and be in the resistance at the same time.

¶3. (C) Al-Sari told PolOffs that the Embassy has been overly critical of the problems at the Ministry of Interior (MOI). He alleged that the problems were created by Ayad Allawi, who filled the MOI with Ba'athists and Saddamists. He said that Bayan Jabr cannot remove these people without being called "sectarian." PolOffs stressed that problems at MOI demonstrate the need for a Minister of Interior who is competent and neutral, has no ties to a militia and is acceptable to all parties.

¶4. (C) Comment. We report these views as reflective of the all too common perspective in Iraqi sectarian politics which views government power as a zero-sum game. In al-Sari's case, this view is linked to the fear that outreach efforts to include Sunni Arabs in government will inevitably lead at a minimum to return to a Sunni-dominated Iraq or even to restored Baath rule. Many of our Sunni Arab contacts still doubt the Shia are more than Persian agents. Building national consensus will be a slow, hard process. End Comment.

¶5. (C) BIONOTE: Hassan Radi Khadim al-Sari was born in Al Ammarah (Missan Province) in 1961. In 1979, he graduated from Baghdad University with a degree in chemistry. Al-Sari was very active in cultural groups and developed several political contacts. In 1980, he established the Hezbollah of Iraq Movement Party. In

1987, he was arrested and sentenced to life in prison (along with his extended family). While in prison, a group of detainees confessed that al-Sari was guilty of additional opposition activities and Al-Sari was re-sentenced and tortured. During the 1991 Shia uprising, he was released from prison. From 1991-1993 he helped restructure his political party and was elected General Secretary. From 1993-1995, al-Sari hid in the marshes of

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Missan while continuing his political activities. For their safety, he sent his family to Iran. Until 2003, he split his time between the marshes and Iran. Al-Sari says he does not engage the media because he prefers to maintain a low profile and conduct programs to benefit those who suffered in his region (particularly orphans of Saddam's victims). Al-Sari claims to have a large following in Missan. He has aligned with SCIRI, is a member of SCIRI's Advisory Council and attends general meetings. As a previous member of the Transitional National Assembly, al-Sari was Deputy Chairman of the Marshes Committee. He said he will seek to serve on this committee when the Council of Representatives convenes.

KHALILZAD